

Maharashtri Prakrit

Maharashtri or **Maharashtri Prakrit** (*Mahārāṣṭri Prākṛt*), is a language of ancient and medieval India which is the ancestor of Marathi and Konkani.^[6] It is one of the many languages (often called dialects) of a complex called Prakrit, and the chief Dramatic Prakrit. Maharashtri was spoken for 1000 years (500 BCE^{[1][2][3]} to 500 CE). It was used in numerous works of literature, and its literary use was made famous by the Sanskrit playwright Kālidāsa.^[2]

Maharashtri Prakrit was commonly spoken until 875 CE^{[1][2][3]} and was the official language of the Satavahana dynasty.^[7] Works like *Karpurmanjari* and *Saptashati* (150 BCE) were written in it. Maharashtri Prakrit was the most widely used Prakrit language in western and southern India.

Maharashtri Apabhraṃśas remained in use until the 13th century, and were widely used in Jain literature, forming an important link in the evolution of the language.

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Maharashtri	
महाराष्ट्री प्राकृत	
Region	Maharashtra and some parts of India
Era	500 BCE ^{[1][2][3]} – 500 CE; developed into Marathi, Konkani ^[4]
Language family	Indo-European <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indo-Iranian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Indo-Aryan<ul style="list-style-type: none">Maharashtri
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	pmh
Linguist List	pmh (http://multitree.org/codes/pmh)
Glottolog	maha1305 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/maha1305) ^[5]

History

The rise of the Prakrits is dated to the middle of the second millennium BCE when they existed alongside Vedic Sanskrit and later evolved into highly developed literary languages.^[8] It is a subject of scholarly debate as to whether Sanskrit or the Prakrits are older with some scholars contending that Sanskrit was born out of the Prakrits.^[9] According to the Sanskrit scholar, Rajaramshastri Bhagawat, Maharashtri is older and more vivacious than Sanskrit.^[10]

Vararuchi, the oldest known grammarian of Prakrit, devotes four chapters of his *Prakrita-Prakasha* (IAST: *Prākṛita-Prakāśa*) to the grammar of Maharashtri Prakrit. The other popular Prakrits—Shauraseni, Ardhamagadhi, and Paishachi—merit only one each.^[11] This preeminence of Maharashtri is confirmed by Dandin (fl. 6th–7th century) who, in his Kavyadarsha, grants it the highest status among all Prakrits.^[9]

Demographics

Maharashtri is the most attested amongst all Prakrit languages.^[12] It was spoken from Malwa and Rajputana (north) to the Krishna River and Tungabhadra River region (south). Historians agree that Maharashtri and other Prakrit languages prevailed in what is now modern Maharashtra.^[1] Maharashtri was widely spoken in Western India and even as far south as Kannada-speaking region.^[13]

Early literature

The *Gaha Sattasati* is attributed to King Hāla (r. 20-24 CE). Other Maharashtri Prakrit works include *Setubandh*, *Karpuramañjarī* and *SriHarivijay*. The language was used by *Vakpati* to write the poem *Gāṇḍavaho*.^{[2][3]} It is also used in the dialogue and songs of low-class characters in Sanskrit plays, especially the famous dramatist *Kālidāsa*.^[2]

Royal patronage

Maharashtri was the official language of the Satavahana dynasty in the early centuries of the Common Era.^[14] Under the patronage of the Satavahana Empire, Maharashtri became the most widespread Prakrit of its time, and also dominated the literary culture amongst the three "Dramatic" Prakrits of the time, Maharashtri, Shauraseni and Magadhi. A version of Maharashtri called *Jaina Maharashtri* was also employed to write Jain scripture.

See also

- Malvani Konkani

References

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Through many evidences Ketkar and Bhagwat have demonstrated that Marathi has not originated from Sanskrit but it is as old as Sanskrit. While highlighting the conclusion of research of Rajaramshastri Bhagwat, Durga Bhagwat (1979, p. 2) remarks, "He showed that old Mahārāṣṭrī is older and more vivacious than Sanskrit." It is an important observation and view both as it comes from Rajaramshastri Bhagwat and Durgabai Bhagwat who were both scholars of Sanskrit and Marathi and their dialects, respectively.

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